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ABSTRACT

A study of relations between perceived closeness and the level of biological maturation of male and female seventh-grade students sought additional support for empirical differentiation between closeness and acceptance. The study also investigated the relation of perceived closeness to parents' reports of satisfaction with parenting, children's participation in family activities, and disagreements over rules. Subjects were 100 male 7th-grade students, 100 female 7th-grade students (each of whom was the oldest child and lived with both natural parents) and their parents. Testing occurred in the families' homes. The parents' questionnaire consisted of a closeness scale, a parental satisfaction scale, a participation in family activities scale, and a disagreement over rules scale, while the children's questionnaires included a closeness scale and an acceptance scale. Results indicated that relations between parent-reported family behaviors and perceived closeness were similar to those found with acceptance alone, but were present even after acceptance was controlled. The implication of this finding is that research based on reports of closeness (as opposed to acceptance) is necessary, because only reports of closeness accurately tap both parents' and children's perceptions. (SKC)

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# Perceived Closeness and Parent-Child Relations in Families of Seventh-Graders

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# Introduction

Closeness to a particular child as perceived by a given parent has received little systematic study in contrast to a myriad of studies of parental acceptance. "Acceptance" appears to capture the extent to which a positive, benevolent attitude towards the child permeates child-rearing in general. Closeness is a somewhat more restrictive and more relationship-oriented term, which implies emotional attachment and intimacy. Recent unpublished work that we have conducted in this area revealed that mothers report being closer to their seventh-grade sons and daughters than fathers and that both sons and daughters report being closer to their mothers than to their fathers, but sons report being closer to both parents than daughters. These descriptions of parent-child relations are similar to earlier findings using similar measures, but with older adolescents. In a study of relations between perceived closeness and the level of biological maturation of the seventh-grade boys and girls, we found support for empirically differentiating between closeness and acceptance. Statistically significant relations were found between closeness and children's pubertal or menarcheal status in all four dyads after acceptance was partialled out of the regression equations. The purpose of this study was to examine the relations between perceived closeness and several parent-reported family behaviors, and to further substantiate the earlier findings that distinguish closeness from acceptance. Multiple regression analyses were employed to determine the relation of perceived closeness to parents' reports of satisfaction with parenting, children's participation in family activities, and disagreements over rules after acceptance was partialled out.

# Method

**Subjects:**

100 seventh-grade boys, 100 seventh-grade girls, and their parents
The seventh-graders were oldest children and living with both natural parents.

**Procedure:**

Families were tested in their homes by research assistants who delivered the questionnaires and remained with the family until they were completed.

**The parents' questionnaires included the following measures:**

**Closeness scale**--items assess both the parent's and the child's perceptions of closeness.

**Parental Satisfaction scale**--items were developed by our staff.

**Participation in Family Activities scale**--items were from Blyth et al. (1978), Kandel and Lesser (1972), and Garbarino (1978).

**Disagreements over Rules**--items were developed by our staff.

**The childrens' questionnaires included the following measures:**

**Closeness scale**--items assess both the child's and the parent's perceptions of closeness

**Acceptance scale**--items were from Spence and Helmreich's (1978) Parental Attitudes Questionnaire.

# Results

1. Means and standard deviations of closeness measures are shown in Table 1.

2. Correlations between closeness and acceptance for each dyad:

   Father closeness to son = .155
   Son closeness to father = .599
   Mother closeness to son = .272
   Son closeness to mother = .585
   Father closeness to daughter = .455
   Daughter closeness to father = .763
   Mother closeness to daughter = .479
   Daughter closeness to mother = .739

3. Relations with parent-reported family behaviors:

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were employed to assess relations between perceived closeness and the family behavior variables. Acceptance was used as a covariate in the analyses to control for any variance which it might predict. Results of the analyses are shown in Table 2. As expected, it was found that parents' reports of closeness predicted a significant proportion of the variance in satisfaction and activities above and beyond that predicted by acceptance. Children's reports of closeness accounted for little or no additional variance. For disagreements over rules, it was found that parents who report being close to their same-sex child engage in fewer disagreements with them. However, no relation was found between parents' reports of closeness and number of disagreements in the mother-son and father-daughter dyads. Children's reports of closeness did not predict any additional variance in any of the dyads.

In light of these results, additional analyses were run in which the children's reports of closeness were entered into the equations after acceptance to determine if they might predict any of the variance in parental reports of family behaviors. These analyses revealed that almost the identical amounts of variance were predicted by both the parents' and the children's reports of closeness regardless of the order entered into the equation.

# Conclusions

As expected, relations found between parent-reported family behaviors and perceived closeness are similar to those found with acceptance alone, but are present even after acceptance is controlled. Affectional and disclosing behaviors account for more variance in family functioning than acceptance alone. It is important to note that only parental reports of closeness predicted these parent-reported indices of family functioning. It seems that a measure such as closeness which taps both the parents' and the children's perceptions of the relationship is important in determining the relations between parent-child relationships and family behaviors. Further work with child-reported indices of family functioning and personal characteristics is being conducted to further elucidate these findings.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Closeness Measures for each Dyad

| Closeness Measure | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Father to Son | 14.787 | 2.325 |
| Son to Father | 13.772 | 2.885 |
| Mother to Son | 16.155 | 2.345 |
| Son to Mother | 14.890 | 2.297 |
| Father to Daughter | 15.200 | 2.424 |
| Daughter to Father | 12.438 | 3.412 |
| Mother to Daughter | 16.171 | 2.250 |
| Daughter to Mother | 13.995 | 3.596 |

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Effects of Closeness on Parent-Reported Family Behavior Variables

| Family Behavior Variable | Step | Closeness Variable | Father-Son | | | Mother-Son | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | $r^a$ | R | $R^2_{change}$ | $r^a$ | R | $R^2_{change}$ |
| Parental Satisfaction | 1 | Parent Report | .35 | .39 | .13*** | .49 | .55 | .24*** |
| | 2 | Child Report | -.04 | .39 | .00 | -.02 | .55 | .00 |
| Family Activities | 1 | Parent Report | .25 | .41 | .06** | .33 | .34 | .11*** |
| | 2 | Child Report | .05 | .41 | .00 | .06 | .34 | .00 |
| Disagree over Rules | 1 | Parent Report | -.22 | .22 | .05* | -.10 | .18 | .01 |
| | 2 | Child Report | -.11 | .25 | .01 | .08 | .19 | .01 |
| | | | Father-Daughter | | | Mother-Daughter | | |
| Parental Satisfaction | 1 | Parent Report | .17 | .50 | .03 | .31 | .41 | .10*** |
| | 2 | Child Report | -.01 | .50 | .00 | -.01 | .41 | .00 |
| Family Activities | 1 | Parent Report | .26 | .40 | .07** | .32 | .45 | .10*** |
| | 2 | Child Report | .22 | .46 | .05* | .06 | .46 | .00 |
| Disagree over Rules | 1 | Parent Report | .05 | .24 | .00 | -.32 | .33 | .10*** |
| | 2 | Child Report | .19 | .30 | .03 | .01 | .33 | .00 |

*N*=100 for each dyad

[a] Semi-partial correlations at the step of entry into the equation.

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

Note: Acceptance was used as a covariate in the equations.